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ABSTRACT

This workshop discussion guide identifies experiences that the family contributes to the life-long learning, growth and achievement of children and adults. In narrative form, the presentation proceeds metaphorically. Family life is seen as a "school curriculum" complete with instruction in three content areas: (1) SELF-CONCEPT (courses offered include Love, Recognition, Time and Responsibility): and (2) ROLE MODELS (courses offered include Feelings, Problem Solving, Reading, and Television Viewing): and (3) COMMUNICATION STYLE (Checking, Probe, Support, and Limits and Consequences). The three "courses of study" are seen as having important implications for academic achievement and success in the world outside the family. The child who approaches academic tasks with a sense of worthiness and competence, who has positive role models to guide the choices of behavior, and who has a variety of strategies for problem solving has an important head start in mastering the skills of achievement. Worksheets for prompting thought about self-concept, role models, and communication style are provided. (Author/RH)

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WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

YOUR STAY WITH FAMILY

An orientation to your most

important learning years

A presentation to the State Early Childhood

Conference, Glassboro State College,

Glassboro, New Jersey

October 30, 1980

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Welcome...

The material presented in this guide is an attempt to identify important experiences that the family contributes to the life-long learning, growth, and achievement of the child and adult. The material expresses an analogy between the **"Family as a School"** and some of the institutions of formal learning with which we are familiar.

As you review the material in the Guide, and participate in related activities, draw upon your recollection of experience as a 'student' in the Family School. In this review of personal history it may be possible to identify, in a concrete way, the importance of the 'curriculum' that was taught there, and the implication of those learnings for the Family School of which you are, (or will become) a 'faculty' member.

This guide was prepared on the eve of publication of what promises to be a most important book by Dr. Benjamin Bloom titled, All Our Children Learning. Dr. Bloom has attempted to define academic achievement in a context that recognizes the potency of the 'curriculum' of the family. While home environment has been a widely-recognized influence on achievement we are only now beginning to achieve some organized understanding of the particular ways that influence is expressed between child and adult.

Unfortunately, the family refuses to stand still for such study. The so-called 'extended' family has evolved into a 'nuclear' family which has been influenced by further change.

With an acknowledgement of change and uncertainty, we will attempt to re-discover some of the more persistent traits of the family as an educational experience that influences personal achievement.

Richard Titus
Coordinator
Parent Development Institute

October, 1980

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Meet Our Faculty...

Mother: The family faculty member you will meet first and, most likely, deal with most frequently during your stay at our institution. You will be assigned this faculty member as your advisor and it will often be the case that this person will provide a strong degree of emotional support as you face the inevitable conflicts that will part of your stay with Family. It is often the case that you and Mother will form close and lasting 'bonds.' And it is often the case that, if you transfer from this particular institution, Mother will accompany you to assure continuity in your program.

Father: Father will serve as another important senior member of the Family faculty, although your contact with him will not be as extensive during your early period of enrollment. While his support of Family has traditionally been as a funding agent, Mother has recently drawn into this important role. In some cases Father has an important role related to the enforcement of the policies and 'rules' of Family, although his importance in providing emotional support should not be under-estimated. Social and economic factors may draw this important faculty member from the Family for varing periods of time.

Siblings: These faculty members (also known as Brothers and Sisters) provide many of the same support roles af Mother and Father, but also introduce a more competitive flavor to life with Family. These faculty members provide the stimulus to some of the most challenging learning you will encounter at Family. You may, for example be asked to assume sudden and unexpected responsibility for one or more of these faculty members, and this responsibility will form an important part of your learning here.

Relatives: Important economic and social changes have forced us to reduce our staffing of relatives at Family. It is increasingly rare that we maintain many of these faculty members on a full-time basis. We have, accordingly, arranged Visitor status for these staff members. Although they are not as much in evidence as in former Family times, they still offer important contributions to your lifetime learning experience at Family.

Associates: Friends and acquaintences of Mother, Father, Siblings, are invited to make guest appearances at Family to bring their own unique habits, knowledge, and viewpoint to the Family experience. They too bring important contributions to your years here at Family.

The Course of Study

While there are many instructional offerings from Family, there are three 'Core' offerings that have particular emphasis:

Self-Concept

Not too many months will pass after your birth before you begin to recognize that you are a separate person from the world of which you are a part. This can be rude shock, and your Family provides experiences and support which help your growth into the status of independent human being. These experiences are generally grouped under the term 'self concept' and typically include the following:

S.C. 101 Love: In this course offering, the family provides physical contact, soothing verbal reassurance, and actions that show their concern for you as a person who is one of them. It is a 'hands-on' experience that enables you to feel that you are deeply valued as a being and family member.

S.C. 102 Recognition: As you begin to acquire new skills and competencies the family recognizes and rewards these acts in a variety of ways. "You did it by yourself!" is one of these important recognitions.

S.C. 103 Time: An often under-estimated support to self-concept is the investment of time by Family members. The unspoken message of this offering is that "You are worth my time" and its effect is highly supportive to a sense of personal importance.

S.C. 104 Responsibility: The family provides you increasing responsibility that tests and challenges emerging skills and confidence. These successes and failures in this course will assist you in developing pride in your own resources as actor and problem-solver.

The courses offered in our 'Self Concept' core continue throughout your Family enrollment. Because they so strongly influence the sense of self, they are fundamental to all achievement, they are often viewed as 'basic' to definition of self, and they are the lessons of the family that are remembered the longest.

Role Models

The use of role models provides some of the most potent teaching known. The words and actions of family members provide 'cues' for behavior that are irresistable. After the recognition that you are an individual person, you are faced with the decision of what to be. The role models that family provides are strong suggestions about the kind of person you can become. The variety of available models is often limited by those particular models that the family faculty provides. Some of the role models include:

R.M. 101 Feelings: In this course offering , family members model the ways in which strong feeling (positive or negative) is expressed. Joy, anger, frustration, celebration, anxiety--all are among the topical feelings expressed in this course.

R.M. 102 Problem-solving: Important role models exist in the ways problems are dealt with. Among the models available in this course are: confrontation, domination, withdrawl and negotiation.

R.M. 103 Reading: Selected as a representative skill related to achievement, the family models of reading behavior influence not only the kinds of reading that are done, but how much time is reserved for that activity.

R.M. 104 Television Viewing: Development of new technology which broadens the interest of television will pose important issues for the family. VTR, color, and large-screens will make TV a more attractive pastime than ever before. The models of TV viewing will be crucial to the pupil of the 1980s.

The courses offered in our 'Role Model' core are widely varied and sometimes difficult to plan. But because the role model is such an efficient teacher, it is important to the family to select those models that represent the most important to them in the growth and development of their 'students.'

Communication Style

Self-concept has provided the overall framework for personal definition, role models have provided choices for behaving. The final core area of the family curriculum is focused on the communication styles that are 'taught' by the family. This area has been selected because it teaches a personal approach to conflict; a condition which is just as much a part of life outside the family as within it.

C.S. 101 Checking: In this course, family members use a question or statement to be sure that they have accurately heard the fact or feeling just expressed by another family member. "You think it's unfair that Jennie goes to bed later?" or "All the kids in the class have to bring one?"

C.S. 102 Probe: In this course, family members use a gentle probe to gather more information or to give the child time to express feelings. "uh-huh," "then what?" or "can you tell me more about what you said?"

C.S. 103 Support: In this course, family members establish eye contact and provide cues (touching, nodding) that show they are interested in hearing out the facts and feelings of other family members.

C.S. 104 Limits & Consequences: In this course, family members establish clear limits that can be understood by other family members and, when necessary, link those limits with consequences that will follow.

Because there are so many different styles of communication, the examples given above represent only a small sample and stress particular strategies that are aimed at conflict prevention. These styles vary a great deal more than supports for self-concept and role models, but also tend to follow patterns. The success of these or any other styles will ultimately be tested by how well they encourage (rather than discourage) communication within the family.

Summary

In our brief glimpse of the Family as a School, we have considered three 'courses of study' within the family that have important implications for academic achievement and success in the world outside the family.

--It is within the family school that the individual defines and develops a sense of self as a loved and worthy person. This sense of self helps the child welcome and overcome new risks.

--Another important family teaching is related to the kinds of behavior that are modeled by other family members. More than any attempt to teach through words alone, these models show the child how to behave.

--Finally, the family school is illustrated as a source of communication styles that assist the child in forming a personal strategy for meeting and resolving conflict.

When we consider the tasks of school--the tasks of achievement--it is important to realize that these 'basics' over-shadow and ultimately influence the outcomes of success and failure that are associated with familiar content tasks in reading and mathematics.

A child who approaches these academic tasks with a sense of worthiness and competence; who has positive role models to guide the choices of behavior; and who has a variety of strategies for problem-solving--that child has an important headstart in mastering the skills of achievement.

--worksheet--

ROLE MODELS

In the spaces provided, give one or more examples of what an observant child would learn about the following:

1. How strong feelings are expressed (positive & negative)

2. How problems are solved

3. The purpose and value of reading

4. The purpose and habits of family TV viewing

-worksheet-

SELF CONCEPT

In the spaces provided below, give an example of the specific kinds of behaviors you would use to support self-concept

1. Love

_____

2. Recognition

_____

3. Time (when, where?)

_____

4. Responsibility

_____

--worksheet--

COMMUNICATION STYLE

For each of the situations given by the presentor, record the first response that comes to mind:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Using the styles suggested in the Guide or another source, list one alternative response for each of the situations given (wait until the first responses have been reviewed)

1/

2/

3/

4/